

# Heresy and the Formation of Medieval Islamic Orthodoxy

*The Making of Sunnism, from the Eighth  
to the Eleventh Centuries*

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Ahmad Khan

*American University in Cairo*



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## Heresy and the Formation of Medieval Islamic Orthodoxy

Between the eighth and eleventh centuries, many defining features of classical Sunni Islam began to take shape. Among these was the formation of medieval Sunnism around the belief in the unimpeachable orthodoxy of four eponymous founders and their schools of law. In this original study, Ahmad Khan explores the history and cultural memory of one of these eponymous founders, Abū Ḥanīfa. Showing how Abū Ḥanīfa evolved from being the object of intense religious exclusion to a pillar of Sunni orthodoxy, Khan examines the concepts of orthodoxy and heresy, and outlines their changing meanings over the course of four centuries. He demonstrates that orthodoxy and heresy were neither fixed theological categories nor pious fictions, but instead were impacted by everything from law and politics to society and culture. This book illuminates the significant yet often neglected transformations in Islamic social, political, and religious thought during this vibrant period.

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*Fā'idat al-tārīkh . . . fa minhā anna al-'āqil al-labīb idhā tafakkara fihā wa ra'ā taqallub al-dunyā bi ahālīhā wa tatāba 'nakabātihā ilā a'yān qāṭinīhā wa annahā salabat nufūсахum wa dhakhā'irahum wa a'damat aṣāghirahum wa akābirahum fa lam tubqi 'alā jalīl wa lā al-ḥaqīr wa lam yaslam min nakdihā ghanī wa lā faqīr zahida fihā wa a'raḍa 'anhā wa aqbala 'alā al-tazawwud li al-ākhhira minhā wa raghiba fi dār tanazzahat 'an hādhihi al-khaṣā'is wa salīma ahluhā min hādhihi al-naqā'is wa la'alla qā'il yaqūl mā narā nāẓir fihā zahida fi al-dunyā wa aqbala 'alā al-ākhhira wa raghiba fi darajātihā al-'ulyā al-fākhira fa yā layta sha'rī kam ra'ā hādihā al-qā'il qārī' al-Qur'ān al-'Azīz alladhī huwa sayyid al-mawwā'iz wa aṣṣaḥ al-kalām yaṭlub bihi al-yasīr min hādihā al-ḥuṭām fa inna al-qulūb mūla' bi ḥubb al-'ājil.*

al-Sakhāwī, al-I'lān bi al-tawbīkh li-man  
dhamma ahl al-tārīkh.

L'histoire est anecdotique.

Paul Veyne, *Comment écrit l'histoire.*

*Lā siyyamā madhhab al-Imām al-A'ṣam Abī Ḥanīfa . . . wujūh istinbāṭihī min al-Kitāb wa al-summa tadīqu 'an ghālīb al-'uqūl fa lā yakādu yaṭṭali' u' alayhā illā aṣḥāb al-kashf.*

al-Sha'rānī, *Muqaddima fi dhamm al-ra'y wa bayān tabarrī al-a'imma al-mujtahidīn minhu.*



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## Preface

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This monograph tells the story of how orthodoxy and heresy evolved alongside one another in a rich medieval religious tradition. It explores how discourses of heresy shaped in fundamental ways the development of orthodoxy in medieval Islamicate societies. In the following pages I examine this religious tradition during what may be considered its most diverse and unpredictable age, the eighth–eleventh centuries. It was during these exciting centuries that many defining features of classical Sunni Islam began to take shape. Among these, the formation of medieval Sunnism around a conviction concerning the unimpeachable orthodoxy of four eponymous founders and their subsequent schools of law must be regarded as one of the lasting achievements and legacies of Sunnism.

By the eleventh century, Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik b. Anas, al-Shāfiʿī, and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal were regarded as representatives par excellence of medieval Sunni orthodoxy. The legal schools that coalesced around them became markers of medieval Sunni orthodoxy, and they spawned a religious tradition that is paralleled in its relevance and longevity throughout Islamic history perhaps only by Sufism. The consensus that classical Sunni Islam was synonymous with the orthodox character of these four eponyms and schools of law was the cornerstone of medieval Sunnism's homeostatic structure that came to define and regulate interactions between diverse groups and movements in the post-formative period of Islamic history. This catholic character of medieval Sunnism was remarkable for its ability to have endured earlier periods of schism, factionalism, anathematisation, and deep communal fissures. We will see that orthodoxy and heresy in the eighth–eleventh centuries are best understood as processes; that is, shifting strategies of denunciation and approval which can elucidate how centuries of conflict and hostility evolved into a stable regime of consensus and negotiation.

Precisely how medieval Sunnism reached this accommodation is no simple story. Its very success demands that as historians we not only acknowledge its formation but seek to explain it and study its aetiology,

without resorting to whiggish tendencies that lead us to describe such consequential developments in the history of medieval Sunni orthodoxy and heresy as inevitable. This book examines the evolution of discourses of heresy and orthodoxy between the late eighth and eleventh centuries to explain how, when, and why classical Sunnism formed around this diverse conception of orthodoxy. It contends that the evolution of heresy and orthodoxy in medieval Islamic history is a complex phenomenon, but that its epochal stages can be made intelligible through a combination of new methodological approaches and by working with a diverse range of primary sources.

This study argues that discourses of orthodoxy and heresy surrounding Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) provide us with original and important insights into the fluid formation of medieval Sunnism between the eighth and eleventh centuries, thereby furnishing considerable documentation for the complex evolution of orthodoxy and heresy in medieval Islam. Contestations over the orthodoxy of Abū Ḥanīfa provide the basis for a new account of medieval Sunnism's formation. The primary objective of this work is to document these two processes – the construction of discourses of heresy against Abū Ḥanīfa and his rehabilitation and subsequent apotheosis as an unrivalled representative of medieval Sunni orthodoxy – during the late eighth and eleventh centuries. This investigation of discourses of orthodoxy and heresy, I argue, provides a new window onto the fluid formation of proto-Sunni orthodoxy. We learn how medieval scholars and textual communities were engaged in constant and rapid efforts to develop an indigenous apparatus through which consensus could be reached about orthodoxy and heresy; how orthodoxy was not a later 'communal fiction' but entailed stages and processes that can be identified and were identified by medieval Muslims. Above all, we gain an insight into how a formidable medieval society and religion negotiated conflict and disagreement without giving birth to a widespread culture of imperial councils, inquisitors, and persecutions.

This book is divided into four parts. Part I provides an introduction to the categories of orthodoxy and heresy in medieval Islam. Here, I outline a new approach in the field of Islamic studies and history towards understanding the role of discourses of heresy in the formation of medieval Sunnism. In the same section I write the mnemohistory of discourses of heresy around Abū Ḥanīfa, which aims to identify the central agents of proto-Sunni traditionalist orthodoxy. Part II contains a detailed analysis of how the discourse of heresy against Abū Ḥanīfa was framed in the context of religion, society, and politics in the late eighth and ninth centuries. Part III explains the processes through which Abū Ḥanīfa was defended against various charges of heresy, focusing on the functions of historical writing and memory towards rehabilitating him. Here,

I contend that the late ninth–tenth centuries marked a turning point in the history of Sunnism with the rise of new forms of writing dedicated to establishing Sunni orthodoxy. Part IV explains how the rehabilitation of Abū Ḥanīfa was a crucial factor in the great convergence in the eleventh century that, despite dissenting views, consolidated medieval Sunnism’s ecumenical character. The final chapter summarises the main conclusions of this study and places them in the context of broader discussions about heresy and orthodoxy in the Islamic world and beyond.

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My own teacher, Christopher Melchert, has always impressed upon me the awareness that as scholars we are steeped in a long scholarly tradition, and that very often we owe more to our predecessors and contemporary peers than we sometimes care to admit. I should like to emphasise my debt and gratitude to scholars, past and present, whose writings I engage with throughout this monograph. Finally, I should like to record my debt to scholars and philologists who have been engaged in the thankless task of discovering, collecting, and editing manuscripts. From nineteenth- and twentieth-century Orientalists in Europe and America to editors in the Middle East, Iran, and the Indian subcontinent, our craft would be

much impoverished were it not for their painstaking editorial efforts. I need not say anything further about them here since some time ago I decided that the best way to show my gratitude to them was to devote a scholarly study to their craft. Work on this has already begun, and I hope to return to it in the future.

My graduate study was made possible through the financial support of a number of institutions. First and foremost, I must thank the University of Oxford, Faculty of Oriental Studies for awarding me the three-year Sheikh Zayed graduate scholarship. Without this I might not have returned to an academic career. The British Institute of Persian Studies (BIPS) and the British Institute in Amman (BIA) provided additional funding for research abroad. Pembroke College supported me with a number of scholarships and prizes over the five years I was a member there. I am grateful to them for their constant support during my studies at Oxford, particularly to Josie Cobb and Alison Franklin. I should also like to thank the staff of the Oriental Institute, particularly Gemma Forster and Priscilla Lange, for being so very understanding and helpful. The librarians of the Oriental Institute (Oxford), Pembroke College (Oxford), Bodleian (Oxford), Firestone Library (Princeton), British Library (London), Chester Beatty (Dublin, Dr Frances Narkiewicz), Staatsbibliothek (Berlin), Dār al-Kutub (Cairo), National Library (Tehran), Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī (Tehran), and the Staatsbibliothek and Asien Afrika Institut libraries (Hamburg) were all exemplary in their professionalism and kindness. This book would have looked very bare were it not for the generosity and knowledge of these librarians. I am particularly grateful to James Weinberger who guided my research at the Firestone Library in Princeton. Time and time again, I found everything I needed (and much more) at the Firestone Library. Additionally, I am indebted to those editors of pre-modern texts who ensured that their indices were comprehensive and reliable.

I should like to single out the invaluable technical assistance I received from my friend Kevin. Just as I was ready to submit my manuscript, my computer and the software I used to write this study failed me. I lost a substantial amount of my data and was unable to access the program with which I wrote this book. Kevin, a man with the patience of Job, intervened and spent hours upon hours trying to rectify the situation. I do not know what I would have done without his generous help and expertise.

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and father have influenced me in ways I cannot possibly describe, but I am forever grateful to them for encouraging me to study history and not law, though I now recognise I am doing both. I would like to thank my paternal grandparents, for both of whom Islamic history was a very dear subject. I regard them as my first teachers. I should like to thank the Orchards, my maternal grandmother, and my three siblings and their families, especially Adam, for their cheerful company. I owe my elder brother an important debt, both metaphorically and literally. Somehow, I got him to agree to bring me back multi-volume editions of medieval texts from his work trips to Cairo and Amman, and all the whilst he refused to let me reimburse him. Finally, I cannot begin to express my gratitude to my wife and children. I shall be thanking them for the rest of my life.

## Notes on the Text

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This monograph adopts the Library of Congress's transliteration system for Arabic and Persian, though specialists should note that there are occasional deviations. For example, I do not distinguish between the *alif* and *alif maqṣūra*. The *tā' al-marbūṭa* is not indicated except in *idāfa* constructions, where it is indicated with a *t*. The affixed masculine pronoun, which is lengthened in pronunciation if it follows a short vowel, shortened if it follows a long vowel, and marked in modern prints of the Quran by a small *wāw*, is not transliterated: so, *rasūluhu* and not *rasūluhū*; *fihi* and not *fiḥī*. The *hamzat al-waṣl* is not distinguished by an apostrophe. Arabic, Persian, and Urdu are transliterated according to similar rules, save that *wāw* is represented by *w* in Arabic and *v* in Persian (and Urdu). In transliterating Arabic, I use hyphens only for the definite article (*al-*) and not for conjunctions or prepositions (*wa*, *li*, *bi*). Were I now to rewrite this entire study, my transliteration style would show greater respect to Classical Arabic pronunciation: in particular, *ah* and not *a* for *tā' al-marbūṭa*; and distinguishing assimilated sun letters.

Major place names are not transliterated and are given in their Anglicised forms (e.g., Medina for Madina). They are transliterated when they appear in Arabic or Persian passages. Lesser-known towns and places are transliterated. All dynastic names are transliterated too. Transliterated words are italicised, except for proper nouns and words that appear in good English dictionaries (e.g., ḥadīth not *ḥadīth*; qadi not *qādī*, except when it appears with a name or in a primary source; Sunni and not Sunnī, etc.). For pointing names, I have usually relied on the expertise of Ibn Ḥajar and Ibn Mākūlā and, failing them, Fuat Sezgin. Where there are serious disputes I have tried to indicate them in the footnotes.

In passages that I have translated from Arabic and Persian, I have endeavoured to provide (as and when I have deemed it necessary and feasible) the corresponding original passages in the main text or in the footnotes. I consider this important because it allows the reader to understand and determine for him/herself the nature of my reasoning and interpretation. It also preserves, in my view, the integrity of the original

text. Readers can see what the author of these passages was attempting to convey as well as my claims to understand their words. It is also on account of the text's integrity that I have translated all aspects of the passages I quote. Any and all invocations, salutations, honorific phrases, or curses have been rendered into English, as and when they occur in a given passage. I must confess my dissatisfaction with my translations of invocations and salutations, which are challenging to convey in English.

This monograph is the product of research and writing conducted in Princeton, Germany, Oxford, the British Library, Tehran, and Cairo. At different institutions I had access to particular editions of medieval texts. I have endeavoured to use scholarly editions of primary sources, but I have also checked these against other editions. This may strike some readers as pedantic. However, different editions of one text often rely on different manuscripts. Checking editions against one another goes a very small way towards dealing with the fluidity that marked the pre-modern manuscript tradition. Furthermore, I have checked editions against the original manuscripts where I have had access to them. I have provided corresponding references in alternative editions of the same work to which I had access for the facility of readers. Not all scholars have access to the kinds of resources provided by the Firestone Library, the Bodleian, and the British Library. I hope this convention will make it easier for scholars to study my references for themselves.

In writing this book, I have observed the stylistic conventions set out in *The Chicago Manual of Style* (16th edn.). All dates are given first according to the Hijri calendar, then according to the Gregorian; however, centuries are given only in the Common Era (e.g., the ninth century). Quranic citations are to the 1924 Egyptian edition based on the recension of Ḥafṣ from 'Āṣim.

In citing works in the footnotes, certain journal titles and reference works have been abbreviated. These are as follows:

BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i> =
EI <sup>2</sup> and EI <sup>3</sup>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 2nd and 3rd editions
GAL	Brockelmann, <i>Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur</i>
GAS	Sezgin, <i>Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums</i>
IJMES	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
ILS	<i>Islamic Law and Society</i>
JAOs	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JSAI	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschriften der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>



*Part I*

History of Orthodoxy



# 1 Introduction

---

This monograph tells the story of how orthodoxy and heresy evolved alongside one another in a rich medieval religious tradition. It explores how discourses of heresy shaped in fundamental ways the development of orthodoxy in medieval Islamicate societies. In the following pages I examine this religious tradition during what to this historian must be considered its most diverse and unpredictable age, the eighth–eleventh centuries. It was during these exciting centuries that many defining features of classical Sunni Islam began to take shape. Among these, the formation of medieval Sunnism around a conviction concerning the unimpeachable orthodoxy of four eponymous founders and their subsequent schools of law must be regarded as one of the lasting achievements and legacies of Sunnism. By the eleventh century, Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik b. Anas, al-Shāfiʿī, and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal were regarded as representatives par excellence of medieval Sunni orthodoxy. The legal schools that coalesced around them became markers of medieval Sunni orthodoxy, and they spawned a religious tradition that is paralleled in its relevance and longevity throughout Islamic history perhaps only by Sufism, Islam’s mystical tradition. The consensus that classical Sunni Islam was synonymous with the orthodox character of these four eponyms and schools of law was the cornerstone of medieval Sunnism’s homeostatic structure that came to define and regulate interactions between diverse groups and movements in the post-formative period of Islamic history. This catholic character of medieval Sunnism was remarkable for its ability to have endured earlier periods of schism, factionalism, anathematisation, and deep communal fissures. We will see that orthodoxy and heresy in the eighth–eleventh centuries are best understood as processes, which can elucidate how centuries of conflict and hostility evolved into a stable regime of consensus and negotiation.

Some scholars of Islam have tended to take for granted the extent of medieval Sunnism’s accomplishment in regulating orthodoxy and heresy. As detailed portraits of the social, religious, and political milieu of the regions of the medieval Islamic world begin to emerge, Islamicists are

becoming more aware of the cacophonous nature of competing religious movements and trends prior to the eleventh century. The religious, legal, political, theological, and cultural traditions of the Nile–Oxus region were marked by a sharp heterogeneity, and each province harboured its unique medley of religious ideas and practices.<sup>1</sup> By the beginning of the eleventh century the twenty-fifth ‘Abbāsid caliph, al-Qādir (r. 381–422/991–1031), had come to recognise that medieval Sunnism had arrived at some degree of consensus as to what constituted Sunni orthodoxy: the recognition of four schools of legal orthodoxy, represented by four eponyms of impeccable Sunni pedigree, was a defining feature of the religious policies of al-Qādir’s reign.<sup>2</sup> The imperial recognition that religious orthodoxy was to be anchored in four schools of law marked not the inception of a new chapter in the formation of medieval Sunnism but rather an acknowledgement of the success of those religious communities and scholars who had made critical contributions towards the completion of this chapter. The state was in the business of following religious trends, not inaugurating them.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Some sense of the diverse ideas and practices against which medieval Sunnism developed can be gleaned from the following works: Sadighi, *Les mouvements religieux iraniens* = Sadighi, *Junbishhā-yi dīnī-yi irānī*; Rekaya, ‘Le Khurram-dīn et les mouvements khurramites sous les ‘Abbāsides’; Tucker, *Mahdis and Millenarians*; Haider, *The Origins of the Shī‘a*, esp. 189–284; Macuch, ‘Die sasanidische Stiftung “für die Seele”: Vorbild für den islamischen waqf’; Macuch, ‘Die sasanidische fromme Stiftung und der islamische waqf: Eine Gegenüberstellung’; János, ‘The Four Sources of Law in Zoroastrian and Islamic Jurisprudence’; Jokisch, *Islamic Imperial Law*; Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*; Crone, *The Nativist Prophets*, 191–371; Cook, ‘Early Muslim Dietary Law’.

<sup>2</sup> See Makdisi, *Ibn ‘Aqīl: Religion and Culture in Classical Islam*, 299 ff.; Makdisi, *Ibn ‘Aqīl et la résurgence*; Makdisi, ‘The Significance of the Sunni Schools of Law’. On the emerging Sunnism under al-Qādir see also Glassen, *Der mittlere Weg*; Makdisi, ‘The Sunni Revival’; Hanne, *Putting the Caliph in his Place*, 71–2. It was during the reign of al-Qādir that scholars explicitly identified the consolidation of Sunnism with the establishment of four legal schools of orthodoxy: Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu‘jam al-udabā’: Irshād al-arīb ilā ma‘rifat al-adīb*, ed. Ihsān ‘Abbās (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993), 5: 1955; see both al-Māwardī, *al-Aḥkām al-sultāniyya wa al-wilāyāt al-dīniyya*, ed. Aḥmad Mubārak al-Baghdādī (Kuwait: Maktaba Dār Ibn Qutayba, 1989), 132; and al-Māwardī, *Adab al-qādī*, ed. Muḥyī Hilāl al-Sarḥān (Baghdad: Maṭba‘at al-Irshād, 1971), 1: 184–88, where Ḥanafism is normalised and interchangeable with Shāfi‘ism. For later declarations of Sunni orthodoxy corresponding to the four schools of law and their eponymous founders see Ibn Hubayra, *Ikhṭilāf al-a‘imma wa al-umam*, ed. al-Sayyid Yūsuf Aḥmad (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2002), 2: 395; Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, ‘al-Radd ‘alā man ittaba‘a ghayr al-madhāhib al-arba‘a’, in Ṭal‘at Fu‘ād al-Ḥulwānī (ed.), *Majmū‘ rasā’il al-ḥāfiẓ Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī* (Cairo: al-Fārūq al-Ḥadītha, 2002), 2: 626; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī tārikh al-mulūk wa al-umam*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā’ and Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā’ (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1992), 18: 31–2.

<sup>3</sup> This is not to undermine the impact that imperial measures such as al-Qādir’s support for traditionalism and his specific measures for promoting four schools of law would have had on the social, religious, and political landscape of late ‘Abbāsid society. On caliphs supporting prevailing religious trends see Melchert, ‘Religious Policies of the Caliphs’, 342.

Precisely how medieval Sunnism reached this accommodation is no simple story. Its very success demands that as historians we not only acknowledge its formation but that we seek to explain it and study its aetiology, without resorting to Whiggish tendencies that lead us to describe such consequential developments in the history of medieval Sunni orthodoxy and heresy as inevitable.<sup>4</sup> It is against such essentialising tendencies that this book proposes to write a history of orthodoxy and heresy in medieval Islam.

This book examines the evolution of discourses of heresy and orthodoxy between the late eighth and eleventh centuries to explain how, when, and why classical Sunnism formed around this diverse conception of orthodoxy. It contends that the construction and evolution of heresy and orthodoxy in medieval Islamic history is a complex phenomenon, but that its epochal stages can be made intelligible through a combination of new methodological approaches and by working with a diverse range of primary sources. This study argues that discourses of heresy surrounding Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) provide us with original and important insights into the fluid formation of medieval Sunnism between the eighth and tenth centuries, thereby furnishing considerable documentation for the complex evolution of orthodoxy and heresy in medieval Islam. Contestations over the orthodoxy of Abū Ḥanīfa provide the basis for a new account of medieval Sunnism's formation.

I draw on the approach of mnemohistory (*Gedächtnisgeschichte*), a key historiographical technique developed by Jan Assmann, which reveals the processes of *making* Abū Ḥanīfa as a heretic among proto-Sunni traditionalists in the eighth and ninth centuries and *unmaking* Abū Ḥanīfa as a heretic among a more diverse coalition of proto-Sunnis from the tenth century onwards. Mnemohistory's central preoccupation is not with reconstructing the facts, beliefs, and details of historical persons. Instead, it investigates how the past is remembered.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, this study is not concerned with what Abū Ḥanīfa and his contemporaries in the eighth century did or did not believe. It explores the mnemohistory of Abū Ḥanīfa to yield valuable insights into the

<sup>4</sup> Examples of studies that gloss over these developments are Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 142–3; Waines, *An Introduction to Islam*, 66; Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam*, 136–7; Weiss, *The Spirit of Islamic Law*, 9; Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, 3; Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, 91; Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, 35–8. This is in no way to suggest that these studies are incompetent. Scholarship is constantly evolving, and it is in this spirit that I draw attention to the need for more comprehensive research on medieval Sunni orthodoxy and heresy.

<sup>5</sup> Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 8–17. For more perspectives on mnemohistory see Tamm (ed.), *Afterlife of Events*, 1–23, 115–33.

mechanisms by which the formation of Sunnism was contested and, gradually, consolidated.

The primary objective of this work is to document these two processes – the construction of discourses of heresy against Abū Ḥanīfa and his rehabilitation and subsequent apotheosis as an unrivalled representative of medieval Sunni orthodoxy – during the late eighth and eleventh centuries. This investigation of discourses of heresy, I argue, provides a new window onto the fluid formation of proto-Sunni orthodoxy. We learn how medieval scholars and textual communities were engaged in constant and rapid efforts to develop an indigenous apparatus through which consensuses could be reached about orthodoxy and heresy; how old orthodoxies were transformed into new heresies and vice versa. Above all, we gain an insight into how a formidable medieval society and religion negotiated conflict and disagreement without giving birth to a widespread culture of imperial councils, inquisitors, and persecutions.

There is no escaping the fact that this book is preoccupied with some central concepts in the study of medieval societies and religious history. It is tempting to set forth a theoretical framework that guides the precise empirical routes navigated throughout this work, but doing so risks reducing the study of complicated and unpredictable historical trajectories to the dogmas of medieval religious history and studies. This point is worth underscoring because one of the central conclusions of this book is that, in very significant ways, the development of orthodoxy and heresy in medieval Islamic history does not conform to the existing paradigms for understanding the formation of orthodoxy and heresy in medieval religious societies.

This is no excuse to set aside the labour involved in undertaking comparative and interdisciplinary research. In the appropriate places, this study explicitly reads the history of orthodoxy and heresy in medieval Islamic societies against and alongside scholarship in the fields of late antiquity, religious studies, institutional history, medieval history, and post-colonial theories of identity and difference. However, interdisciplinary work is valuable only after the philological, historical, and social and cultural peculiarities of one's specialist discipline have been documented. In the words of the greatest (fictional) researcher of our times, 'It is a capital mistake to theorise before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts.'<sup>6</sup> In this way, theory and interdisciplinary methods can inform, rather than be superimposed onto, the study of medieval Islamic history and societies. This part of the Introduction is limited, therefore, to explaining how the book

<sup>6</sup> Doyle, *Sherlock Holmes*, 12.

defines terms such as orthodoxy and heresy, whilst later sections of the book, in particular Chapters 1 and 2, extend these definitions through a close reading of the primary sources.

The study of orthodoxy and heresy in medieval Islam has yet to develop into a systematic field of historical inquiry – so much so, in fact, that many treatments of these subjects in Islam show little engagement with the primary literature.<sup>7</sup> There are four noteworthy approaches in previous scholarship to deal with these problematic categories for the study of Islamic history. The first adopts a static, institutional interpretation of orthodoxy and heresy whose starting point is the obvious observation that Islam has neither church, councils, nor clergy. According to this view, the absence of such visible institutional structures vitiates the very value of such inquiries.<sup>8</sup> There is no doubt that the observation is an accurate one. But the lack of obvious parallel structures should not force us to abandon the search for similar mechanisms and agents by which orthodoxy and heresy were negotiated. This monograph argues that such an axiomatic assertion concerning the institutional apparatus of medieval Christendom and its absence in the medieval Islamic world cannot be used to dismiss the study of orthodoxy and heresy in medieval Islam. Such approaches no longer reflect the level of detail and sophistication now visible in scholarly treatments of orthodoxy and heresy in pre-modern European societies, and they also fall short in examining how non-European medieval societies developed indigenous attitudes and apparatuses for regulating their societies.<sup>9</sup>

Other approaches vacillate between broad conceptual essays on the subject of categories and detailed studies based on a restricted body of primary sources. A second approach, for example, proposes erudite but general assessments of the problems thrown up by the categories of orthodoxy and heresy. Alexander Knysh proposes sensible caveats to discussions of orthodoxy and heresy in Islamic history, noting that such terms should not be used indiscriminately.<sup>10</sup> Norman Calder presents another intelligent essay on the character of orthodoxy in Sunni Islam. Calder is not concerned with describing how orthodoxy and heresy were negotiated in the formative period of Islamic history, though he is keen to underline the importance of intellectual traditions over orthopraxy as defining the character of Sunni orthodoxy. Calder's essay presents an argument for how scholars today should conceive of orthodoxy, and his proposal is that the literary tradition of Islam, squeezed between the

<sup>7</sup> Henderson, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy*; Ames, *Medieval Heresies*.

<sup>8</sup> Wilson, 'The Failure of Nomenclature'.

<sup>9</sup> Goldziher, *Vorlesungen über den Islam*, 183–4 = *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 162–3.

<sup>10</sup> Knysh, 'Orthodoxy and Heresy in Medieval Islam'.

bookcases of any traditional library, presents a snapshot of the vast parameters of orthodoxy in Islam.<sup>11</sup> In 1953 Bernard Lewis offered a valuable overview of the semantic field of heresy in Islamic history but, framing them as no more than observations, Lewis advanced too many generalisations.<sup>12</sup>

The third approach places far too much emphasis on (and trust in) the heresiographical sources to reconstruct how medieval Muslims defined orthodoxy and heresy. This tendency is apparent in Knysh's attempt to locate the sites of orthodoxy. Despite his careful and sophisticated reading of medieval heresiographers such as al-Shahraṣṭānī (d. 548/1153) and al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935–6), Knysh's article prioritises the heresiographical (*firaq*) genre to adumbrate the development of orthodoxy and heresy.<sup>13</sup> The focus on heresiography to write the history of orthodoxy and heresy in medieval Islam is reflected in a number of important studies.<sup>14</sup> A fourth approach views heresy through the lens of political history. In such studies, heresy and orthodoxy are viewed as mechanisms by which the state and the caliph regulated the social and religious order of medieval societies.<sup>15</sup> Historians who adopt this view succumb to the seductive historiographical framework that Peter Brown, in a not too dissimilar context, has criticised as reflecting an 'institutionalised egotism' – the conviction that real power resided in the emperor and the imperial apparatus.<sup>16</sup> My own study builds on the work of scholars such as George Makdisi, Christopher Melchert, Maribel Fierro, Muhammad Qasim Zaman, Eerik Dickinson, Josef van Ess, Wilferd Madelung, Jonathan Brown, Scott Lucas, Wael Hallaq, and Devin Stewart, all of whom have advanced the study of medieval Sunnism in significant ways by detailing its contested history.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Calder, 'The Limits of Islamic Orthodoxy'.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis, 'Some Observations on the Significance of Heresy'.

<sup>13</sup> Knysh, 'Orthodoxy and Heresy in Medieval Islam', 50–6.

<sup>14</sup> Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*; van Ess, *Der Eine und das Andere*; Lewinstein, 'The Azāriqa in Islamic Heresiography'; Lewinstein, 'Making and Unmaking a Sect'; Judd, 'The Third Fitna'; Laoust, *Les schismes dans l'Islam*.

<sup>15</sup> Judd, 'The Third Fitna'; Turner, *Inquisition in Early Islam*; Hawting, 'The Case of Ja'd b. Dirham'; Marsham, 'Public Execution in the Umayyad Period'.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> For their path-breaking work in the study of orthodoxy and the formation of medieval Sunnism and Shi'ism see Makdisi, 'Tabaqāt-Biography'; Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law*; Melchert, 'Traditionist-Jurisprudents'; Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*; Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*; Madelung, 'The Early Murji'a'. On proto-Sunnism and the ḥadīth literature see Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early 'Abbāsids*; Dickinson, *The Development of Early Sunnite Ḥadīth Criticism*; Hallaq, *Origins and Evolution*; Lucas, *Constructive Critics*; Brown, *The Canonization*; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*. Maribel Fierro has pioneered the study of heresy and



The chief objective of this study is to identify the evolution of a discourse of heresy concerning Abū Ḥanīfa to demonstrate the epochal stages and shifts in the formation of Sunni orthodoxy. In contrast with some of the aforementioned approaches, this study proposes a new framework for the investigation of orthodoxy and heresy in medieval Islamic societies. There is a long tradition of describing what orthodoxy is in medieval Islam through theoretical essays and abstractions.<sup>18</sup> These certainly have their place; but it has been my preference to establish what orthodoxy and heresy meant in medieval Islam by documenting the very process of orthodoxy and heresy on the basis of medieval voices. Nevertheless, our work as historians must be intelligible to colleagues and readers unfamiliar with the particular details of medieval Islamicate society. For this reason, it is necessary that I explain how the framework of orthodoxy and heresy I propose relates to wider scholarship in the disciplines of medieval history and religious studies.

We should start with Walter Bauer's radical revisionist thesis published in 1943, which challenged the conventional ecclesiastical understanding of early Christian orthodoxy and heresy. In his *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* Bauer departed from the scholarly consensus that viewed heresies as genuine and concrete social movements which developed as deviations of earlier orthodox communities. He shifted the scholarly understanding of heresies away from one that saw in orthodox representations of heretics and heresies an accurate depiction of deviant

orthodoxy in medieval Andalus: Fierro, *La heterodoxia en al-Andalus*; Fierro, 'Heresy in al-Andalus'; Fierro, 'Accusations of zandaqa in al-Andalus'; Fierro, 'Religious Dissension in al-Andalus'.

<sup>18</sup> Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*; and, more recently, Ahmed, *What Is Islam?* 270–97; Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy*, 3–5. Ahmed has valuable insights about how modern scholarship accounts for Muslim orthodoxy, and his own interventions are very useful. However, it is one thing to posit something about medieval orthodoxy or argue about modern definitions of orthodoxy. It is another thing altogether to document the dynamics of orthodoxy based on the medieval sources themselves, which is what my study attempts. On a related note, readers of Ahmed's *What Is Islam?*, 113–52, might argue that my study reinforces a flawed paradigm that sees Islamic law as denoting orthodoxy. To be clear, my study contends that the schools of law represented one important dimension of medieval orthodoxy, but by no means the only one. I might have more sympathy for Ahmed's argument that *madhhab-i 'ishq* has been marginal to modern scholarly conceptions of what was 'meaningfully Islamic' to pre-modern Muslims were it not that his documentation for *madhhab-i 'ishq* and criticism of 'legal-supremacist' Islam rests on an old canard that sees Law as denoting orthodox Islam and Sufism as a manifestation of heterodox Islam. It amazes me that a scholar of Ahmed's analytical depth and acuteness for Orientalist readings of Islam in many respects attempted to rehabilitate such a patently flawed hypothesis. What is more, Ahmed marshals figures such as Sa'dī to buttress this hypothesis, who himself on at least one occasion was reluctant to distinguish between the two (*bar kafī jāmi-sharī'at bar kafī sindān-i 'ishq, har hawās-nākī nadānad jāmi va sindān bākhtan*). See Sa'dī, *Ghazaliyāt-i Sa'dī*, ed. Kāzīm Bargnaysi (Tehran: Fikr-i Ruz, 2002), 728 (ghazal no. 521).

movements to one that emphasised the processes by which orthodox communities projected heresies and heretics. In Bauer's retelling of early Christian history, major Christian communities in the Roman provinces practised 'heretical' forms of Christianity, whilst orthodoxy represented a limited and less widespread belief system adopted only by a particular form of the Church of Rome. That is to say, for Bauer, the ecclesiastical understanding of heresy as a secondary, deviant and fringe development was untenable. The historical evidence suggested that ecclesiastical conceptions of what constituted heresies represented the original and more diffuse understanding of early Christian belief.<sup>19</sup>

Bauer's re-imagining of the landscape of early Christian religious communities brought into sharp relief the problems posed by categories such as orthodoxy and heresy. There is no doubt that his work infused fresh doubts into medieval portrayals of heresies and heretics and made the precarious character of heresy the cornerstone of modern approaches to orthodoxy and heresy in early and medieval Christianity. Bauer's impact on the study of orthodoxy and heresy in late antique and medieval history has been immense. Yet his forceful dislodging of the Eusebian account of the origins of orthodoxy and heresy was still burdened by a reification of these categories nowhere more evident than in his essentialising of heresy and orthodoxy.

It is here that I adopt a different approach from Bauer's to the study of orthodoxy and heresy in medieval Islam. The spectacular work of Alain Le Boulluec is hard to imagine without Bauer's initial foray into the subject. For our book, the implications of Le Boulluec's work are far more promising. Le Boulluec's two-volume study, *La notion d'hérésie dans la littérature grecque IIe–IIIe siècles*, places 'représentations hérésiologiques' at the forefront of the study of orthodoxy and heresy in second- and third-century Greek patristic thought. Le Boulluec's work inaugurates a shift away from the value-laden character of much research into heresy and orthodoxy by revealing the discursive strategies involved in the construction of heresy by an array of gifted Christian heresiologists. For Le Boulluec, the writings of early Christian heresiologists such as Justin, Hegesippus, and Irenaeus reveal the precise strategies and mechanisms by which a discourse of heresy is constructed, articulated, and targeted at opponents.<sup>20</sup>

This last insight is crucial to the argument of this book, though in two contrasting ways: this monograph posits that heresy in the formative

<sup>19</sup> Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* = trans. *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*.

<sup>20</sup> Le Boulluec, *La notion d'hérésie*.

centuries of Islam rested on the construction of discourses of heresy. The closer we examine such discourses, the more they reveal about the evolving nature of proto-Sunni orthodoxy, the influence of its promulgators, and the shifting fortunes of these discourses. On the other hand, Le Boulluec makes explicit claims to working within a Foucauldian framework in which notions of discourse acquire centre stage. But, for Foucault, one of the elementary requirements of identifying discourses was to read everything.<sup>21</sup> Had he any idea of the quantity of primary sources in Arabic and Persian, to say nothing of other Islamicate languages such as Ottoman Turkish, I am certain he would have exercised some flexibility in his formulation.<sup>22</sup> To be very clear, I lay no claim to having read everything. Nevertheless, I agree with the main thrust of Foucault's argument, which I interpret to be his concern that scholars would claim to locate discourses that in actual fact were visible in one genre only.<sup>23</sup> By placing discourses and not institutions at the centre of the study of orthodoxy and heresy in medieval Islam, I am arguing that the power to assert and establish narratives of orthodoxy or heresy depended on the construction of texts and textual communities. Books do not exist by their own powers. They represent existing and well-established networks and systems of references.<sup>24</sup> They are part of a discursive field, and deploying this Foucauldian analysis provides new insights into the actual work (and agents) of orthodoxy. We should remind ourselves, if only because the term 'discourse' has often been stripped of its original Foucauldian meaning, that Foucault defined discourse in the following way: 'Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, concepts and thematic choices, one can define a regularity, we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a discursive formulation.'<sup>25</sup>

Discourses of heresy surrounding Abū Ḥanīfa in a wide range of texts and through mechanisms, strategies, and thematic choices that reoccur frequently signal a discursive formation that defined proto-Sunni traditionalist conceptions of orthodoxy. Studying the emergence of these discourses furnishes key insights into the formation of proto-Sunni traditionalist orthodoxy and its evolving hegemonic constellations. Perhaps more significantly, the failure to sustain discourses of heresy concerning

<sup>21</sup> Foucault, *Aesthetics*, 262–3, 303; Foucault, *Ethics*, 486.

<sup>22</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 146, where Foucault expresses the difficulty in describing all of a society's archive.

<sup>23</sup> Foucault, *Aesthetics*, 303.

<sup>24</sup> Foucault, *Aesthetics*, 304; Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 26.

<sup>25</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 41.

Abū Ḥanīfa as part of proto-Sunni traditionalism's vision of orthodoxy allows us to pursue the fascinating story of the failures and successes that shaped the evolution of proto-Sunnism. Finally, a primary advantage is gained by studying discourses of heresy and orthodoxy for its ability to orient scholars towards how and to what end such discursive positions are distributed. In this formulation, heresy and orthodoxy in the formative period of Islamic history are studied as shifting strategies of denunciation and approval. They are not seen as insuperable, hierarchical impositions on matters of doctrine and ritual. They do not function only in historical contexts that presume an ecclesiastical culture of councils, creeds, and inquisitions. Rather, discourses of heresy and orthodoxy appear to depend heavily on a combination of political life, social imaginaries (*mentalités*), ethno-racial identities, and religious ideas. In this study, therefore, I posit heresy not as a legal or theological category but as a process.

Based on a wider set of sources, one of the main contentions of this monograph is that discourses of heresy and orthodoxy should not be viewed through the prism of doxa and praxis alone. Discourses of heresy went far beyond this. They operated in the three quintessential spheres of medieval Islamic societies: religion, politics, and society. Also central to my argument about how discourses of orthodoxy and heresy functioned in medieval Islam is to posit orthodoxy at the end rather than the beginning of the process of community identity and formation. This allows us to identify local and temporal variations across the late eighth and eleventh centuries. Orthodoxy thus defines a temporary preponderance of significant and persistent views claiming to be representative. This power of consensus enables groups and movements to articulate and disseminate discourses of heresy. In turn, this gives birth to a discursive formation of terms, semantic fields, concepts, and attitudes that seek to identify and isolate heretics. Daniel Boyarin saw in discourses of orthodoxy and heresy in the second and third centuries a crucial site for excavating a genealogy of Judaism and Christianity in late antiquity. Boyarin, like Le Boulluec and other Islamicists, ascribes exceptional agency to heresiologists of the second century. The idea of orthodoxy, Boyarin argues, owes its origins to a group of Christian writers who compose heresiologies, which inscribe border lines, regulate, police, inspect, and enforce them. The consolidation of this discourse on boundaries, once adopted by any two groups, resulted in the establishment of palpable confessional identities and boundaries, the crossing of which signalled a move from one group to another. As anathematisers of heretics and heresies grew, those who were inside and those who were outside became clearly identified. For Boyarin, the very function of heresiology, therefore, was

Christian identity.<sup>26</sup> My own formulation is not nearly as dramatic as Boyarin's. However, the regularity of discourses of heresy against Abū Ḥanīfa, their system of dispersion, their common themes and statements denote the discursive formation of heresy. Above all, they help historians to catalogue the history of community formation and communal identity.

This is one of the chief points of departure between Le Boulluec's work and mine. Where heresiological texts form the basis of Le Boulluec's analysis of how orthodoxy and heresy are constructed, this study is more circumspect about the value of heresiographical sources for shedding light on when, how, and why orthodoxy and heresy evolved in the formation of medieval Sunnism. This, in fact, represents what I consider to be a weakness not just in Le Boulluec's approach but in the work of exceptional Islamicists who depend so heavily on the heresiographical genre in pursuit of studying orthodoxy and heresy in medieval Islam.

If our aim as historians is to reformulate conventional medieval accounts of documented heresies and orthodoxies, the heresiographical literature is likely to serve as our best guide. This is not my objective. The confessional demands of the genre are so explicit as to render them almost futile, except in a few specific cases, for historians seeking to locate subtle shifts and evolutions across the late eighth to eleventh centuries. They are valuable for their insights into how Sunni orthodoxy projected itself and reimagined its past from the tenth century onwards: in these works we are provided with a highly schematised narrative designed to adumbrate and organise a very complex history of social and religious movements into distinct typologies and tidy historical origins. This form of confessional narrative has been described by John Wansbrough as a procedure that historicised dogma:<sup>27</sup>

Fundamental to the documentation of confessional identity was selection of appropriate insignia from the monotheist compendium of symbols, topoi, and theologoumena. What could be called the 'sectarian syndrome' exhibits a lingua franca composed of such elements, whose sole condition of employment is adaptability. These may be adduced as nomenclature (tags, eponyms, toponyms), as emblems (initiation rites, ritual acts), as creeds (membership rules), as catechisms (dogmatic formulae) and correspond functionally to the several stages of confessional elaboration.

Wansbrough's analysis reminds us of the pitfalls historians face if they limit themselves to, or depend too heavily upon, the heresiographical

<sup>26</sup> Boyarin, *Border Lines*.

<sup>27</sup> Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 99–100. In fact, ch. 3 of *The Sectarian Milieu* is inspired by Bauer's work on heresy and orthodoxy in early Christianity. The fate of Wansbrough's book is that it is a study often cited but seldom engaged with.

genre for the work of historical reconstruction, for the latter is concerned with delineating change over time. This study does not jettison the genre altogether, but nor does it assign the genre a central place in the reservoir of primary sources I draw upon. In this sense, I do not adopt the approach taken by A. H. M. Jones, who notoriously dismissed ecclesiastical or theological sources as ‘chaff’.<sup>28</sup> I use heresiographical works as controls, indicating in the footnotes curious and relevant sections where these works shed light on arguments whose substance is found in non-heresiographical sources.

A study of discourses of heresy surrounding Abū Ḥanīfa has particular merit because it demonstrates the specific ways in which proto-Sunni orthodoxy evolved. It is vital, therefore, to clarify and define the terms I use to describe religious movements between the late eighth and eleventh centuries. By the beginning of the eleventh century medieval Sunnism had acquired a fairly stable identity that centred around schools of law, ideas about theology, mysticism, caliphs, dogmas about the past, and against other religious groups in Islam (Twelver Shi‘ism, Zaydism, etc.). That we can speak of a stable medieval Sunni orthodoxy is underscored by the emerging doctrine that representatives of these schools and groups might have disagreed with each other but, nevertheless, viewed such disagreements as legitimate. Following modern scholars, I use the term proto-Sunni to refer to religious movements prior to medieval Sunnism, that is to say, between the eighth and tenth centuries. Proto-Sunni is a large and all-embracing term, however. It can refer to so large a constitution of Muslims, ideas, and groups that it can become futile in its heuristic employment.<sup>29</sup> For this reason, and to accentuate the existence of greater variety in the eighth–tenth centuries, I draw attention in this study to a literate and influential religious elite I term proto-Sunni traditionalists. There is no pure equivalent designation in the primary sources for this group, and here I submit my own dissatisfaction with such an incomplete resolution. The nearest equivalent would be the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*, who are frequently referred to in the secondary literature as traditionalists.<sup>30</sup> My primary discomfort with using the term traditionalist

<sup>28</sup> Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 284–602, vi–vii.

<sup>29</sup> This is one common criticism of an otherwise impressive account of eighth–ninth-century religious movements: Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early ‘Abbāsids*.

<sup>30</sup> Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1: 386–92 and a discussion of Hodgson’s ‘ḥadīth folk’ in Melchert, ‘The Piety of the Hadith Folk’, 425–7; Fück, ‘Die Rolle des Traditionalismus im Islam’; Makdisi, ‘Remarks on Traditionalism in Islamic Religious History’; Makdisi, ‘Ash‘arī and the Ash‘arites in Islamic Religious History I’, 49–50 (where we find a detailed definition of traditionalism, which I adhere to closely; though, the traditionalist–rationalist tension is central to Makdisi’s article and subsequent research); Goldziher, *Die Zāhīriten*, 3–19 = *The Zāhīrīs*, 3–19 (Goldziher’s observation is astute, especially

is that it relies heavily on, or at least inadvertently invokes, a paradigmatic division in the primary sources of the ninth century onwards: *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* (traditionalists) and *aṣḥāb al-ra'y* (rationalists). It is an indisputable fact that our primary sources speak of serious divisions between these two groups. At the same time, however, this simple division became a mechanism for glossing over a broader set of divisions between these groups that did not pertain immediately to ḥadīth or jurisprudence. These readings viewed the formation of medieval Sunnism as a compromise between traditionalists and rationalists. A compromise was certainly reached, but not by traditionalists and rationalists of the ninth century, and not all traditionalists were open to rapprochement. One of the key tenets of proto-Sunni traditionalism was the exclusion of Abū Ḥanīfa as a heretic and deviant figure, and many proto-Sunni traditionalists made no concessions with respect to this doctrine. In short, proto-Sunnism is too broad a designation, and traditionalism/rationalism runs the risk of denoting a specific genealogy of medieval Sunnism that minimises earlier conflict and neglects what was really at stake (see Table 1.1).<sup>31</sup>

because he was writing at the end of the nineteenth century; nevertheless, it misses some very important elements in the broader conflict between traditionalism and rationalism, in part because of the dearth of published material to which Goldziher had access); Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, esp. ch. 6; Graham, 'Traditionalism in Islam' (a broad interpretive essay on variations of traditionalism in Islamic history, which inadvertently highlights the problem that newcomers to the field, or outsiders, will confront when trying to determine what traditionalism is supposed to designate); Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law*, 1–22 (which examines the conflict between traditionalism and rationalism in greater detail than previous scholarship and shows its manifestation beyond mere jurisprudential disagreement); Melchert, 'Traditionist-Jurisprudents' (which delineates more specific trends and groups on the traditionalist–rationalist spectrum); Hallaq, *Origins and Evolution*, 122–8 (which argues for a ninth-century synthesis or compromise among traditionalists and rationalists); El Shamsy, *The Canonization of Islamic Law*, 195–201 (which focuses on the compromise of traditionalists but without reference to the significant corpus of refutations against al-Shāfiʿī).

<sup>31</sup> Recent attempts to use the appellation *ahl al-sunna* or *ṣāḥib al-sunna* to document the emergence of Sunnism leave me unconvinced. Gautier Juynboll first proposed this very method to understand the rise of Sunnism, and John Nawas has recently undertaken it (Juynboll, 'Some New ideas on the Development of *Sunna*'; Juynboll, 'An Excursus on the *Ahl as-Sunna*'; Nawas, 'The Appellation *Ṣāḥib Sunna* in Classical Islam'). Nawas's analysis leaves me entirely dissatisfied. It shows no sensitivity to the acute problem of using later sources to reconstruct eighth–ninth-century developments ('In principle all published classical Arabic biographical dictionaries, ranging from Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845) to Ibn al-ʿImād (d. 1089/1679) were used for data collection': p. 4, n. 9). The method fails to consider the fact that our ninth–eleventh-century sources exhibit a good deal of geographical diversity. Readers of texts produced in Iraq and Khurāsān/Transoxiana from this period cannot fail to notice the lack of consistent terminology for groups and ideas in these regions. Nevertheless, Nawas is content with making grand claims upon the basis of this questionable method ('This feature of randomness . . . ensures that the results of our sample are generalisable. That is to say, the conclusions from this random sample very probably hold for the entire population under study, in the present case, all ulama of



Table 1.1 *Evolving terminology of Sunnism*

Term	Period	Description
Proto-Sunnism	8th–9th centuries	Comprising movements subsumed into classical Sunnism
Proto-Sunni traditionalism ( <i>ahl al-ḥadīth, ahl al-sunna</i> )	8th–9th centuries	One movement among proto-Sunnism
Proto-Ḥanafism ( <i>ahl al-ra'y, aṣḥāb Abī Ḥanīfa, ahl al-Kūfa</i> )	8th–9th centuries	Students affiliated with Abū Ḥanīfa and his circle
Ḥanafism	10th century	Classical school of law
Classical Sunnism	10th century	Based around the schools of law, accommodating opposing positions, and incorporating all of the above

As I acknowledge, proto-Sunni traditionalism is not a satisfactory resolution, and it is for this reason that I have undertaken the effort of documenting proto-Sunni traditionalists (their writings, ideas, and networks), so that when I refer to proto-Sunni traditionalism readers can identify its adherents. Now, by the eleventh century, things had changed radically. Medieval Sunnism was now defined by its fidelity to four eponyms: Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik b. Anas, al-Shāfiʿī, and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. Their legacies spawned, arguably, the defining religious institutions of the medieval Islamic world, the schools of law (*madhāhib*). Today, Thomas Carlyle's theory of history being commensurate with great heroes is out of vogue, but it is worth recalling that for medieval Muslims history was intimately tied to collective memories about a few great men.

Parts of this book may be misread as an attempt to deconstruct this historiographical edifice. It should be stated at the outset that this is not my objective. This study presents a historical explanation for the social, political, cultural, and religious forces that contributed to this impressive and long-standing feature of Islamic orthodoxy. As such, and contrary to trends in the field of religious studies, I contend that orthodoxy was not a later 'communal fiction' of medieval Muslims who suppressed earlier narratives of tension and conflict. Rather, they were transparent about orthodoxy being a contested process.

the first four centuries of Islam': p. 5). Nawas does not show his readers his sources, so there is little else I can say beyond this comment.



Though this book presents the first comprehensive treatment of discourses of heresy with respect to Abū Ḥanīfa, it is not the first to identify hostility towards Abū Ḥanīfa in the primary sources. Goldziher was the first scholar to draw attention to Abū Ḥanīfa's 'very poor reception from his conservative contemporaries'.<sup>32</sup> On the basis of the heresiographical literature, both Madelung and van Ess have attempted to reconstruct some of Abū Ḥanīfa's theological views.<sup>33</sup> The most significant references to anti-Ḥanafī material can be found in two publications of Christopher Melchert, and I see the present book as building upon his work on the history of medieval Sunnism.<sup>34</sup> The 'problem of Abū Ḥanīfa' is noted also by scholars such as Eerik Dickinson and Scott Lucas.<sup>35</sup> And, more recently, Jonathan Brown has emphasised the importance of studying how scholars such as al-Bukhārī and Abū Ḥanīfa achieved 'Sunni status'.<sup>36</sup>

Unlike some previous scholarship, this study is not concerned with reconstructing the life and thoughts of Abū Ḥanīfa. This decision is partly motivated by the problems presented by ninth-century sources in describing the outlook of an eighth-century scholar. As I have stated, this book argues that contestations surrounding Abū Ḥanīfa's shifting reputation as a heretic and then later as a pillar of Sunni orthodoxy bring into sharp relief the diverse forces and figures that defined the struggle over orthodoxy and heresy in Sunnism. It does not pretend to provide all the answers to the formation of medieval Sunni orthodoxy, but it seeks to contribute to issues that are found wanting in current scholarship. This monograph will, I hope, encourage new investigations into the contested history of orthodoxy and heresy in medieval Islam, paying particular attention to the cumulative role played by social, religious, political, and cultural factors in its formation. To this end, this study is divided into four parts. Part I writes the mnemohistory of discourses of heresy concerning Abū Ḥanīfa based on sources composed between the ninth and eleventh centuries. This section provides a comprehensive historical examination of how hostility towards Abū Ḥanīfa evolved in the space of three centuries. A central objective of this chapter is to explain the formation of proto-Sunni traditionalist networks connected through shared conceptions of orthodoxy and heresy. Discourses of heresy around Abū Ḥanīfa were

<sup>32</sup> Goldziher, *Die Zāhiriten*, 13–16 = *The Zāhīrīs*, 13–16.

<sup>33</sup> Madelung, 'The Origins of the Controversy', 508–11; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, 1: 183–212.

<sup>34</sup> Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law*, 1–12, 48–60; Melchert, 'How Ḥanafism Came to Originate in Kufa', 332–3.

<sup>35</sup> Dickinson, 'Aḥmad b. al-Ṣalt'; Lucas, *Constructive Critics*, 350–1.

<sup>36</sup> Brown, *The Canonization*, 363.

central to the emerging corporate identity of proto-Sunni traditionalist scholars and textual communities, and by studying them in detail a clearer picture of the key agents of proto-Sunni traditionalist orthodoxy begins to emerge.

Part II proposes a typology of discourses of heresy. This section explores the themes and *topoi* within the vast range of primary sources studied in Part I to demonstrate that discourses of heresy went far beyond matters of doctrine and ritual. I contend that discourses of heresy concerning Abū Ḥanīfa show that conceptions of orthodoxy and heresy were woven into the very fabric of society and social imaginaries, religion, and politics. This section details precisely how heresy was framed in the context of broad developments in medieval Islamic societies during the late eighth–eleventh centuries.

One of the central aims of this book is to explain the changing nature of proto-Sunni traditionalist orthodoxy. How was it that a sustained and pervasive discourse of heresy against Abū Ḥanīfa failed to establish itself as part of medieval Sunnism's broad conception of orthodoxy by the beginning of the eleventh century? Parts III and IV are devoted to explaining these momentous changes in medieval Sunni orthodoxy. Part III explains the processes by which Abū Ḥanīfa was unmade as a heretic, focusing on the functions of historical writing and historical memory towards rehabilitating Abū Ḥanīfa. In this respect, I assign an important role to two genres of historical writing (*manāqib* and *masānīd* works), hitherto severely neglected in the study of medieval Islamic religious history, towards the successful integration of Abū Ḥanīfa among the select constellation of paragons of medieval Sunni orthodoxy. Part IV explains how the rehabilitation of Abū Ḥanīfa was a crucial factor in the great convergence in the eleventh century that, despite dissenting views, consolidated medieval Sunnism's ecumenical character.<sup>37</sup> The final chapter summarises the results of this monograph and places them in the context of broader discussions about heresy and orthodoxy in medieval societies and religions.

In general, this study will sketch the development of discourses of heresy and how they figured in the development of proto-Sunni traditionalist orthodoxy. I hope to show that dispensing with the concept of

<sup>37</sup> The modern process of editing of ninth–eleventh century texts, as part of nineteenth- and twenty-first-century efforts to identify, edit, and publish these sources, provoked new and old contestations regarding the legacy of discourses of heresy surrounding Abū Ḥanīfa and Ḥanafism. The modern reception and interpretation of medieval debates concerning Abū Ḥanīfa's rehabilitation signals just how impermeable the eleventh-century consensus of medieval Sunni orthodoxy was, for which see Khan, 'Islamic Tradition in an Age of Print'.

orthodoxy altogether, as Wilson suggests, before any substantial work has been done on the subject, is both rash and brazen. Similarly, declaring that there is no orthodoxy in Islam, as van Ess does, principally because medieval Islam lacked a church or centralising authority, ignores how different religious communities and groups cultivate and build social consensus and regulate activities and practices.